

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 1, as follows:

~~TITLE OF THE INVENTION.~~

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 4, as follows:

~~BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION.~~

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 5, as follows:

~~Field of the Invention.~~

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 6, as follows:

The ~~present invention~~ technology described herein relates to game machines and programs therefor and, more specifically, to game machines for evaluating a player's operation based on his/her response to prompts in games (preferably music games), and in accordance with the evaluation, changing a difficulty level of the game operation, and game programs/game control programs executed in such game machines.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 14, as follows:

~~Description of the Background Art.~~

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 22, as follows:

In the conventional technique described in the above publication, however, the difficulty level to be selected prior to the game is non-changeable during the game. Therefore, if the player's selected difficulty level does not match to his/her actual competence, the player has to continue ~~till~~ until the end ~~of a the game~~ which is too difficult or too easy for him/her. Moreover, the player himself/herself makes the selection of difficulty levels. ~~Thus, if the player is~~ therefore does not correctly ~~recognizing~~ recognize his/her own competence, he/she may not appropriately set the difficulty level. ~~may not be appropriately set.~~

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 2, line 6, as follows:

Also, in the conventional technique described in the above publication, an operation relating to a certain operation button is skipped from the game contents if ~~selected is the~~ a low difficulty level is selected. In this case, the operation itself is skipped (i.e., an operation timing is not provided) so that a difference in operation timing occurs between the general difficulty level (or high difficulty level) and the low difficulty level. There thus arises a problem that playing with the low difficulty level ~~is hardly~~ provides a training for the general difficulty level (or high difficulty level).

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 2, line 17, as follows:

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION
EXEMPLARY NONLIMITING
EMBODIMENTS.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 2, line 18, as follows:

Therefore, an ~~object of the present invention~~ aspect of the exemplary nonlimiting embodiments is to provide game machines for automatically changing, based on an evaluation made on a player's game operation, the difficulty level of the game operation in the middle of the game instead of having the difficulty level be non-changeably selected by the player, and programs therefor.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 2, line 24, as follows:

Further, another ~~object of the present invention~~ aspect of the exemplary nonlimiting embodiments is to provide game machines in which an operation timing is not changed (neither increased nor decreased) even if the difficulty level is changed so that the game contents remain the same between the low difficulty level and the general difficulty level (or high difficulty level), and programs therefor.

Please delete the paragraph beginning at page 3, line 5 in its entirety.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 3, line 7, as follows:

A first aspect of the ~~present invention~~ exemplary nonlimiting embodiments is directed to a game machine for executing a predetermined game in response to a player's operation, and the game machine comprises a display section, operation switches, an

operation pattern data storage section, a display control section, an evaluation section, and a difficulty level change section.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 3, line 13, as follows:

The display section displays a game screen. The operation switches are operated by the player. The operation pattern data storage section stores operation pattern data including operation timing data defining an operation timing of the operation switches to be operated by the player, and operation type data defining which type of the operation switches is to be operated with the operation timing. The display control section enables the display section to sequentially displayed, based on the operation pattern data, information about the operation timings and the types of the operation switches to be operated by the player. The evaluation section successively evaluates, with the progress of the game, correlation between the operation timings and types of the operation switches operated by the player responding to the information displayed on the display section, and the operation timings and types defined by the operation pattern data. The difficulty level change section dynamically changes a difficulty level of a game operation input in accordance with the evaluation made by the evaluation section for a predetermined period.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 4, line 7, as follows:

As described above, in the first aspect, the difficulty level of the game operation input can be changed in the middle of the game ~~responding~~ responsive to the evaluation

made on the game play contents for a predetermined period, ~~that~~ That is, ~~responding the~~
difficulty level can be changed responsive to the player's actual competence (here, if the
predetermined period for evaluation is set shorter, the resultant evaluation can
immediately be reflected ~~onto~~ in the difficulty level). Especially, by lowering the
difficulty level automatically, even ~~the player who is not skilled~~ an unskilled player can
enjoy the game ~~until~~ until the game's end, and also can get skilled step by step. On the
other hand, by increasing the difficulty level automatically, even the skilled player can
enjoy the game without getting bored, and also the difficulty level can ~~be always~~ always
be set appropriately corresponding to his/her improvement. Moreover, the player has no
need to set his/her difficulty level so that the difficulty level can ~~be always~~ always be
automatically changed to be appropriate even if he/she ~~is does not recognizing~~ recognize
his/her actual level.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 4, line 24, as follows:

~~Here,~~ The game machine further ~~comprised~~ comprises ~~are~~ a music data storage
section for storing music data, a music data reproduction section for reproducing the
music data, and a presentation effect generation section for generating a predetermined
presentation effect responding to how the operation switches are operated. By previously
storing operation pattern data which corresponds to music data in the operation pattern
data storage section, ~~corresponding to the music data~~, the operation pattern data ~~defining~~
defines which type of the operation switches is to be operated by the player with what

timing, ~~the~~ The display control section will be able to have ~~thus enable~~ the display section to sequentially displayed the information about the operation timings and the types of the operation switches to be operated by the player responding to the music data reproduced by the music data reproduction section.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 5, line 12, as follows:

In this manner, the game machine of the first aspect ~~can be applied to the~~ can provide a fun music game for fun.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 6, line 4, as follows:

~~As such, b~~ By changing the number or the type of the operation switches to be used, or by varying the music tempo, the operability of the game is changed, ~~and thus~~ The difficulty level can thus be changed without affecting the game contents.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 6, line 8, as follows:

~~If this is the~~ In this case, the difficulty level change section skips the operation type data responding to the evaluation being poor, controls the display control section to ~~have enable~~ the display section ~~performed to provide a display,~~ and controls the evaluation section to perform evaluation only in terms of the correlation between the operation timings of the operation switches operated by the player and the operation timings defined by the operation pattern data. Alternatively, responding to the evaluation

being poor, the operation type data defining a specific type of ~~the~~ operation switches may be changed to data of any other type of ~~the~~ operation switches which are easier to operate in operation, and the display control section may be so controlled as to ~~have~~ enable the display section performed to provide a display, and the evaluation section can be controlled to evaluate the correlation between the operation timings and the types of ~~the~~ operation switches operated by the player and the operation timings defined by the operation pattern data and the types of ~~the~~ changed operation switches.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 6, line 25, as follows:

~~In this manner, w~~With the low difficulty level, the operation (operation timing) remains as it is so that the operation timing does not differ between the general difficulty level (or high difficulty level) and the low difficulty level. Therefore, the player can learn the operation timing with the low difficulty level, and be ready for the general difficulty level (or high difficulty level). That is, the player first learns the operation timing, and then learns what type of operation switches he/she is supposed to operate. As such, the player can learn how to play the music step by step.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 7, line 10, as follows:

Alternatively, in the case where the operation type data defines that a plurality of types of the operation switches are to be operated simultaneously, ~~responding and in response~~ to the evaluation being poor, the difficulty level change section can skip the data

relating at least to one type of the operation switches out of the plurality of types of the operation switches to be operated simultaneously, and control the display control section to ~~perform~~ provide a display and the evaluation section to perform evaluation.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 7, line 18, as follows:

~~As such, if~~ the game requires simultaneous ~~presses~~ operation switches to be pressed, the operation switches needed to be pressed simultaneously may be limited in number when the difficulty level is low (or limited to only one operation switch). In this manner, the difficulty level can be changed.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 7, line 23, as follows:

~~Here, preferably, the~~ presentation effect generation section may always generates the presentation effect corresponding to the types of the operation switches defined by the operation pattern data ~~irrelevant to~~ irrespective of the control by the difficulty level change section.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 8, line 3, as follows:

In this manner, the presentation effects remain the same no matter what difficulty level. Therefore, even ~~if not skilled, the~~ an unskilled player can enjoy the game as ~~others who are skilled~~ much as skilled players. Furthermore, if the game has harmonious adjustment in presentation effects among a plurality of game machines, the presentation

effects will remain the same even if the difficulty level varies among those game machines, ~~thereby causing no inconvenience.~~ Convenient and consistent game play can therefore be provided.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 8, line 11, as follows:

Preferably, when the operation timings and types of the operation switches operated by the player coincide with the operation timings and types defined by the operation pattern data, the evaluation section is ~~so set as to increase~~ a game score, and differs the increase of the game score according to the difficulty level.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 8, line 24, as follows:

~~As such, by~~ By controlling the game score based on the operation contents and the difficulty level, the game can be fun to a greater degree provide even greater enjoyment.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 9, line 2, as follows:

A second aspect of ~~the present invention~~ the exemplary nonlimiting embodiments is directed to a program for controlling the game executed in such a game machine ~~in the~~ such as that described above in the first aspect, and the. The program comprises a reading step, a displaying step, an evaluating step, and a changing step.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 9, line 7, as follows:

In the reading step, ~~read is~~ predetermined operation pattern data is read including the reading of operation timing data defining an operation timing of operation switches to be operated by a player, and operation type data defining which type of the operation switches is to be operated with the operation timing. In the displaying step, based on the operation pattern data, information about the operation timings and the types of the operation switches to be operated by the player is sequentially displayed on the display section of the game machine. In the evaluating step, ~~with~~ based on the progress of the game, correlation between the operation timings and types of ~~the~~ operation switches operated by the player responding to the information displayed on the display section, and the operation timings and types defined by the operation pattern data is successively evaluated. In the changing step, a difficulty level of a game operation input is dynamically changed in accordance with the evaluation made by the evaluation section for a predetermined period.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 9, line 24, as follows:

In order to apply this program of the second aspect to ~~the~~ a music game, ~~comprised may be~~ an exemplary embodiment may include a music data reading step, a reproducing step, a generating step, a reading step, a displaying step, an evaluating step, and a changing step.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 10, line 3, as follows:

In the music data reading step, predetermined music data is read. In the reproducing step, the music data is reproduced. In the generating step, a predetermined presentation effect is generated responding to a player's operation of the operation switches. In the reading step, ~~read is predetermined operation pattern data including, data~~ corresponding to the music data is read. The read data includes operation timing data defining an operation timing of operation switches to be operated by the player, and operation type data defining which type of the operation switches is to be operated with the operation timing. In the displaying step, based on the operation pattern data, information about the operation timings and the types of the operation switches to be operated by the player corresponding to reproduction of the music data is sequentially displayed on the display section of the game machine. In the evaluating step, ~~with based~~ on the progress of the game, correlation between the operation timings and types of the operation switches operated by the player responding to the information displayed on the display section, and the operation timings and types defined by the operation pattern data is successively evaluated. In the changing step, a difficulty level of a game operation input is dynamically changed in accordance with the evaluation made by the evaluation section for a predetermined period.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 11, line 1, as follows:

~~Here, in~~ In response to an instruction made in the changing step, the operation type data may be skipped or ~~cleared the skip,~~ the skip cleared partially or entirely, and ~~said the~~ displaying step may perform display control and ~~said the~~ evaluating step may perform evaluation. Alternatively, in response to the instruction made in the changing step, the evaluating step may evaluate the operation type data which is skipped or skipped and cleared partially ~~of or~~ entirely. Alternatively, in response to the instruction made in the changing step, the operation type data in the operation pattern data may be changed or ~~canceled the change~~ may be canceled, partially or entirely, and the displaying step may perform display control and the evaluating step may perform evaluation. Alternatively, in response to the instruction made in the changing step, the displaying step may have the display section displayed the operation timings and the types defined by the operation pattern data in a different tempo.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 11, line 16, as follows:

~~If this is the~~ In this case, in response to the instruction made in the changing step corresponding to the evaluation being poor, the displaying step can skip the operation type data and has the display section ~~performed~~ provide a display, and the evaluating step can evaluate only the correlation between the operation timings of the operation switches operated by the player and the operation timings defined by the operation pattern data. Alternatively, in response to the instruction made in the changing step corresponding to the evaluation being poor, the displaying step can change the operation type data defining

a specific type of the operation switches to data of any other type of the operation switches which are easier in for the user to successfully operate operation and can have the display section ~~performed~~ provide a display, and the evaluating step evaluates the correlation between the operation timings and the types of the operation switches operated by the player and the operation timings defined by the operation pattern data and the types of the changed operation switches.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 12, line 8, as follows:

Alternatively, in the case where the operation type data defines that a plurality of types of ~~the~~ operation switches are to be operated simultaneously, and in response to the instruction made in the changing step corresponding to the evaluation being poor, the displaying step and the evaluating step can perform display and evaluation, respectively, ~~the of~~ data relating at least to one type of the operation switches out of the plurality of types of the operation switches to be operated simultaneously is skipped.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 12, line 17, as follows:

~~Here, preferably, t~~The generating step may be so set as to always generate the presentation effect corresponding to the types of the operation switches defined by the operation pattern data ~~irrelevant~~ irrespective of the instruction made in the changing step.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 12, line 21, as follows:

~~Also, preferably, w~~When the operation timings and types of the operation switches operated by the player coincide with the operation timings and types defined by the operation pattern data, ~~further comprised may be an exemplary embodiment may further~~ comprise a step of increasing a game score and differing the increase of the game score according to the difficulty level.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 13, line 2, as follows:

~~Further, preferably, t~~The evaluating step may be so set as to evaluate a coincidence between the operation timings defined by the operation pattern data and the operation timings of the operation switches operated by the player based on a predetermined allowable range extending from the operation timings defined by the operation pattern data. At this time, the allowable range may be differed based on the difficulty level.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 13, line 12, as follows:

These and other objects, features, aspects and advantages of the ~~present invention~~ exemplary nonlimiting embodiments will become more apparent from the following detailed description of the exemplary nonlimiting embodiments ~~present invention~~ when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 13, line 18, as follows:

FIG. 1 is an outer view of a game machine 1 according to one exemplary nonlimiting embodiment of the present invention.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 14, line 18, as follows:

DESCRIPTION OF THE ~~PREFERRED~~ EXEMPLARY NONLIMITING
EMBODIMENTS.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 14, line 19, as follows:

FIG. 1 is an outer view of a game machine 1 according to one exemplary nonlimiting embodiment of the present invention. In the present exemplary nonlimiting embodiment, ~~exemplified is a portable game machine as is shown in FIG. 1~~, but the game machine of the present invention is not limited in type, and may be a stay-at-home type.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 17, line 12, as follows:

The music game described here is ~~the one~~ by which operation information (timing and type) of the operation switches 2 needed for playing the music is displayed on the screen of the display section 3, and the music will be correctly played by the player's sequentially operating any appropriate operation switches 2 in accordance with the display. In this music game, the correctness of the music play is indicated by scores.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 17, line 21, as follows:

Once the game is started, the game machine 1 ~~has~~allows the player to select particular selected~~which~~ music (step S301). Here, if the player selects “game end” in step S301, the game machine 1 accordingly ends the game (step S302, Yes). After a music is selected in step S301, the game machine 1 first reads, from the memory, music data played as BGM in the game (including any music play except for music parts to be played by the player)(step S303). Next, the game machine 1 reads, from the memory, music score data of the music selected by the player (step S304). Such music data and music score data are previously stored in the ROM 21 in the cartridge 20.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 18, line 20, as follows:

Referring to the flowchart of FIG. 4 next, ~~described is a music score data display process carried out in step S306 of FIG. 3~~ is described. In this music score data display process, ~~carried out is a process~~ is carried out for displaying operation prompts (specifically, prompts for operation timing and type) based on the music score data. Because ~~used in the game of the present embodiment are the A button 2a, the B button 2b, and the cross key 2c~~ are used in the game of the present exemplary embodiment, operation prompts as to these operation switches 2 are displayed. Here, when the difficulty level is lowered, no display is made relating to the cross key 2c. Display relating to the A button 2a and the B button 2b is always made.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 19, line 17, as follows:

~~As such, in~~ In the music score data display process, the ON/OFF status of the
difficulty-level-lowered flag is used as the basis for determining whether ~~displaying the~~
operation relating only to the A button 2a and the B button 2b is to be displayed, or
~~displaying the operation relating to the cross key 2c~~ is to be displayed in addition to the
operation of the A button 2a and the B button 2b.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 19, line 23, as follows:

~~Described in~~ In the above example, ~~is that~~, when the difficulty-level-lowered flag is
set ON, the operation relating only to the A button 2a and the B button 2b is displayed.
Here, if the operation contents of the cross key 2c are controlled so that operation of this
key is not to be processed in the operation process (which will be described later), the
operation relating to the cross key 2c may still be displayed on the screen. Under such
control, the player will not notice that his/her difficulty level has been lowered so that the
player will ~~stay happy during~~ continue enjoying the game even if he/she is not familiar
with the game operation. Alternatively, the A button 2a and the B button 2b may be so
set as not to be different from each other in operation, and only the operation of the A
button 2a may be displayed (in this case, ~~keep~~ the operation timing is kept as it is, and
~~totally replace~~ the operation timing for the B button 2b is totally replaced with the
operation timing for the A button 2a). As another possibility for control, any operation
switch which is difficult to press (e.g., positions far, small in size) may be changed to any

operation switch which is easy to press (e.g., positions close, large in size). For example, the operation switches which are difficult to press may be the R switch 2d, the L switch 2e, the start switch 2f, and the select switch 2g.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 20, line 19, as follows:

In the above example, the difficulty-level-lowered flag immediately after the game start is presumed to be set OFF. If its initial state is set to be ON, ~~another effects it~~ can be expected that the difficulty level becomes higher when the player is skilled. In other words, the increase or decrease of the difficulty level is relative, ~~and there is no relevance to the scope of the present invention.~~

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 21, line 1, as follows:

Referring to FIG. 5 next, an example of ~~the~~ music score data is described.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 21, line 3, as follows:

The music score data is composed of, on a constant basis of the timing, information about the operation of the A button 2a and the B button 2b, and information about the operation of the cross key 2c. The cross key 2c is defined as being pressed together with the A button 2a and the B button 2c at the same time. As an example, with the A button 2a and the B button 2b only, the operation is limited ~~in~~ to two variations ~~to two~~. On the other hand, by pressing the cross key 2c together therewith, the operation

will have ten variations including: button press only the A button 2a; button press only the B button 2b; button press the A button 2a simultaneously with the cross key 2c in each one of four directions; and button press the B button 2b simultaneously with the cross key 2c in each one of four directions.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 21, line 16, as follows:

In the example of FIG. 5, a timing is constantly equal to a quarter of a bar, and operation information is defined for any operation switch 2 needed for the timing. For example, with a timing number 1, ~~defined is information about operating only the “A button”~~ is defined, and with a timing number 2, ~~defined is information about~~ simultaneously operating the “B button” and “the lower part of the cross key” is defined. The above example is not restrictive, and the timing may be arbitrarily selected as to be one-eighth of a bar, for example.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 22, line 7, as follows:

In the example of FIG. 6, ~~displayed on the screen is information about operating~~ the A button 2a, the B button 2b, and the cross key 2c on the basis of two bars is displayed on the screen. In FIG. 6, ○ mark is used to indicate which of the A button 2a and the B button 2b is to be operated, and thereby, the player will know that he/she is supposed to operate the button indicated by the ○ mark. Also, an arrow in the ○ mark indicates which part of the cross key 2c is supposed to be operated simultaneously with

the A button 2a or the B button 2b. Herein, the diagonally shaded area indicates the timing for operating the operation switches 2. It should be noted here that the description found in the drawing (e.g., “A button only”) and the timing numbers (“1” to “8”) are not displayed in the actual game. The timing for operation may be indicated not by shading the corresponding area but by sound.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 22, line 21, as follows:

Once the music game is started, information about the timing number 1 is shaded to indicate the player that now is the time to operate only the “A button” ((a) of FIG. 6). After a predetermined length of time, ~~indicated next is~~ information about the timing number 2 by shading the corresponding area is indicated next, and notifies the player to operate the “B button” and the “lower part of the cross key” at the same time ((b) of FIG. 6). Thereafter, such a display is continuously ~~done~~ provided in the similar manner until the music score data reaches its last timing number.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 23, line 25, as follows:

Here, when the difficulty-level-lowered flag is set ON, the information currently displayed relating to the operation of the cross key 2c may be immediately stopped ~~to be~~ from being displayed. Alternatively, as to the cross key 2c, ~~stopped to be displayed may~~ be information about the following bars to be newly displayed through scrolling may be

stopped from being displayed. In this manner, the difficulty level can be lowered without causing the player to feel odd (without being noticed by the player).

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 24, line 8, as follows:

As ~~t~~Techniques for changing the difficulty level other than the above example may include, for example, increasing or decreasing the number of bars to be displayed in the screen ~~may be increased or decreased~~, increasing or decreasing the music score data ~~may be increased or decreased~~ in size for display, or changing the music ~~may be changed~~ in tempo. Alternatively, any predetermined character may appear on the screen to disturb the player to check the display, or shading may not be provided any more to indicate the operation timing.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 24, line 16, as follows:

Referring to the flowchart of FIG. 9, ~~described next is~~ the operation process carried out in step S307 of FIG. 3 is described next.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 24, line 18, as follows:

After displaying the music score data on the screen of the display section 3 with the music score data display process gone through (step S306 of FIG. 3), the game machine 1 determines whether the player has made any input through the operation switches 2 (step S901). If there is any input made through the operation switches 2, the

game machine 1 records, on a predetermined memory, the inputted operation contents as operation data (step S902), and then determines whether the timing with which the operation switches have been operated is the same as the timing which is defined and indicated by the music score data for operation (step S903). ~~Here, if a determination is made that determined as not yet the timing for operation is not right~~ (“NO” in step S903), the game machine 1 generates a sound (or a phrase) corresponding to any operation switch 2 operated by the player (step S917), and ends this operation process. On the other hand, ~~if determined as now is a determination is made that~~ the time for operation in step S903 is right (“YES” in step S903), the game machine 1 increases the score of the game, ~~that~~ That is, adds some points are added to the current score corresponding to the coincidence of the timing (step S904).

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 25, line 11, as follows:

After addition is made to the game score, the game machine 1 refers to the recorded operation data so as to determine whether the operation switches 2, i.e., A button 2a and the B button 2b have been correctly operated as defined and indicated by the music score data (step S905). ~~Here, if determined a determination is made that as the~~ operation has been correct, the game machine 1 checks ON/OFF of the difficulty-level-lowered flag (step S906). When the difficulty-level-lowered flag is set OFF, the recorded operation data is referred to for further determining whether the operation switches 2, i.e., the cross key 2c has been correctly operated as defined and indicated by the music score

data (step S907). On the other hand, if the difficulty-level-lowered flag is set ON, without paying any attention to the operation of the cross key 2c, the game machine 1 generates a sound (or a phrase) corresponding to the music score data (corresponding to the types of the operation switches 2 defined in the music score data) (step S911). Then, the score of the game is increased, ~~that~~ That is, some points for the lowered difficulty level are added to the current score corresponding to the coincidence of the operation switch 2 by type (step S912).

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 26, line 6, as follows:

If ~~determined~~ a determination is made in step S907 ~~as that~~ the operation of the cross key 2c has been correct, the game machine 1 generates a sound (or a phrase) corresponding to the type of the operation switch 2 operated by the player (step S908). Then, the score of the game is increased, ~~that~~ That is, some points for the general difficulty level are added to the current score corresponding to the coincidence of the operation switch 2 by type (step S909). Here, if the score addition with the general difficulty level in step S909 is set higher than the score addition with the lowered difficulty level in step S912, the player's skill (the difficulty level) will differ the score even if the same music is played.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 26, line 17, as follows:

After the score addition in steps S909 and S912, the game machine 1 records “success” to determination result data (step S910). The game machine 1 then determines whether the recorded “correct” successively appears in the determination result data for a predetermined number of bars (three bars in this example) (step S913), and only when the recordation of “correct” successively appears, sets the difficulty-level-lowered flag to OFF (step S914), and ends this operation process.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 26, line 25, as follows:

If it is determined in step S905 that the A button 2a and the B button 2b have not been correctly operated, or if it is determined in step S907 that the cross key 2c has not been correctly operated, the game machine 1 generates a sound (or a phrase) corresponding to any operation switch 2 operated by the player (step S915), and then records “error” to the determination result data (step S916). This is the end of the operation process.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 27, line 7, as follows:

On the other hand, if it is determined that there has been no input made through the operation switches by the player in step S901, the game machine 1 determines whether now is supposedly the time to operate the operation switches 2 (step S918). Here, if it is determined that now is the time to operate, the game machine 1 records “error” to the determination result data (step S919). If it is determined that now is not the

time to operate, on the other hand, this is the end of the operation process. The game machine 1 then determines whether the recorded “error” successively appears in the determination result data for a predetermined number of bars (three bars in this example)(step S920), and only when the recordation of “error” successively appears, sets the difficulty-level-lowered flag to ON (step S921), and ends the operation process.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 28, line 14, as follows:

Prior to going through steps S903 and S918, the game machine 1 sets an allowable range in terms of time lag of the operation timings. ~~Assuming~~ Assume here that the range is set so ~~set~~ as to allow any time lag for two regions preceding and subsequent to a region to which the timing considered most preferable is assigned. In the processing in steps S903 and S918, based on whether the recording position of the operation data falls within this allowable region, it is determined whether the timing is right or not. By taking the operation data shown in FIG. 10 as an example, the operation timing inputted responsively to the timing number 3 is processed as the timing being right since it is within the allowable range (step S904). On the other hand, the operation timing inputted responsively to the timing number 2 is processed as the timing being not right since it is not within the allowable range (step S917). Here, for the case where the difficulty level is lowered, the allowable range may be widened to be favorable for determining the timing coincidence.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 29, line 6, as follows:

In the process of step S905, ~~checked is the coincidence of the button type~~is checked. That is, ~~i.e.,~~ whether the A button 2a and the B button 2b in the operation data show coincidence with the A button 2a and the B button 2b defined and indicated by the music score data for operation is checked.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 29, line 11, as follows:

Similarly, in the process of step S907, ~~checked is the coincidence of the pressed part of the cross key 2c~~is checked. That is, ~~i.e.,~~ whether the pressed part of the cross key 2c in the operation data shows coincidence with the part of the cross key 2c defined and indicated by the music score data for operation is checked.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 29, line 19, as follows:

FIG. 11 is a conceptual illustration showing the regions to which the determination result data is recorded, and those regions are provided respectively corresponding to the timing numbers of the music score data. As shown in FIG. 11, when the determination result data to be recorded indicates “success”, an ○ mark is recorded to the region to which the corresponding timing number has been assigned, and when the determination result data to be recorded indicates “error”, an × mark is recorded to the region to which the corresponding timing number has been assigned.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 30, line 3, as follows:

~~Further, described next is a~~ A determination method executed in steps S913; and S920 of FIG. 9 by using this determination result data is described next.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 30, line 6, as follows:

In the determination process of step S913, ~~checked is whether the determination result data indicating the~~ o mark successively appears for a predetermined number of bars is checked. In the determination process of step S920, on the other hand, ~~checked is whether the determination result data indicating the~~ x mark successively appears for a predetermined number of bars is checked. If the predetermined number of bars is three, ~~checked is 12 pieces of determination result data in terms of timing number~~ is checked. In the example of FIG. 11, the timing numbers 5 to 16 are regarded as successive errors, and the timing numbers 21 to 32 are regarded as successive successes.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 30, line 17, as follows:

Lastly, referring to FIG. 12, ~~described is the case where the game machine 1 is a game machine executing not the~~ a non-music game is described ~~but others~~. FIG. 12 shows the game machine 1 executing a whack-a-mole game. This game is a game of whacking a mole hopping out of several holes, ~~and~~ The player uses the cross key 2c together with the A button 2a or the B button 2b to designate which hole to whack ((b) of FIG. 12). In order to apply the above described technique to such a game, the required

operation for the general difficulty level may be (b) of FIG. 12, ~~and~~ and Once the difficulty level is lowered, the operation may be limited to use only the A button 2a and the B button 2b as shown in (c) of the same drawing, or only the A button 2a as shown in (d) of the same drawing.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 31, line 15, as follows:

As described above, in the game machine of one embodiment ~~of the present invention~~, the difficulty level of the game operation input can be changed in the middle of the game depending on ~~how the player is actually skilled~~ the actual skill level of the player. Especially, by automatically lowering the difficulty level, the player can enjoy the game till the end even if he/she is not competent enough, and thus he/she can ~~be~~ become skilled in a step by step manner.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 32, line 11, as follows:

While the ~~invention~~ exemplary embodiments ~~have~~ has been described in detail, the foregoing description is in all aspects illustrative and not restrictive. It is understood that numerous other modifications and variations can be devised without departing from the scope of the invention.